

A Most Dangerous Time

by Harlan Cleveland

Assistant Secretary for International Organization Affairs¹

We have been living this month in one of those rare moments of conflict and clarity when each of us must try to be his own expert on international affairs; and each of us has an equal right to cloud the crystal ball of world politics.

At such a moment you will always find some public speaker alerting his audience to the simultaneous presence of great dangers and great opportunities in the world round about. What he means, of course, is that he does not and cannot know what the future will bring.

But danger and opportunity do go hand in hand, especially in times of crisis. They have done so for a very long time. Even in ancient China the ideographic sign for "crisis" was a combination

of the symbol for "danger" and the symbol for "change," which, in turn, is an element of the symbol for "opportunity."

Just about a year ago at his press conference President Kennedy commented that "we happen to live in the most dangerous time in the history of the human race." No one—including the man in the Kremlin—could know a year ago that this danger would come to a climax in the form of 42 medium-range ballistic missiles on the small and misgoverned island of Cuba. But there was then—and still is—the danger of nuclear war by design or by accident unless agreement can be reached to bring the nuclear arms race under control. There was then—and still is—the nightmarish vision of what has been called, rather antiseptically, the "nth country problem"—meaning the spread of nuclear capability beyond the present nuclear powers and the emergence of not

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4 but 6 or 8 or 10 or 12 nuclear powers, not one nuclear arms race but two or three or four of them at once. There was a year ago—as still there is—the business of relations between the Soviet Union and Communist China; the half dozen or so danger spots in Europe, the Far East, the Middle East, and Africa; and the constant danger of social and political breakdown as old nations seek to modernize at breakneck speed and new nations try to master the tricky business of governing themselves.

But the center of the danger has been the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Today we know that this confrontation between the United States and the U.S.S.R. reached its most dangerous postwar crisis to date, not in Berlin or the Middle East or Africa or Southeast Asia or even Korea, but, of all places, in the Caribbean; we know that what the Communists miscall the “socialist camp” is made up of warring theological factions; and we know that the unaligned nations are going through an agonizing reappraisal of the value of Soviet commitments and the dubious wisdom of counting on the friendship of Communist China.

We are, in brief, in a period of major readjustments—of power and of thinking about power. No one knows what kind of adjustment will emerge, or how long it will take, or whether the dangers or the opportunities will predominate in the months and years ahead.

Nevertheless I want to share with you this evening some thoughts about why things may have broken loose the way they seem to have done and speculate for a moment about what this might have to do with what American students should be learning and American teachers should be teaching.

Fortunes of the U.S.S.R. as a Nation

There are those, of course, who see nothing but dangers for the United States in the fluidity of the current situation. There are those who are unable to believe that world communism is anything but the faultless and unanswerable voice of the future. There are those who refuse to admit that Soviet society has changed a jot or a tittle, who insist that the Soviet leaders are still spud Marxists whose every move can only be fully explained by the forces Lenin and Trotsky

“zigs and zags.” There are those, including vociferously loyal Americans, who believe that most of what happens in this world is happening because the Communists planned it that way. You have met them in every living room and every cocktail party, the good folk who are persuaded that for a decade or more the West has been in steady and abject retreat before the onrushing Communist juggernaut.

But such people not only lack faith in our strength, our will, our intelligence, and our system; they are ill-informed to boot. They cannot or will not read the record of reality spread out before them in the news of each passing day.

If we want to arrive at a rational view of the mixed dangers and opportunities of the day, we should try hard to look at the world from where the Russians view it—not to shed tears for their manifold troubles but to measure how deeply troubled they have reason to be.

It is worth a few minutes for a backward look at the fortunes of the Soviet Union and of communism between the end of World War II and the time when Chairman Khrushchev set up missile pads in Cuba and Chairman Mao pushed his infantry divisions through the high Himalayas.

The Soviet Union during this period has clearly emerged as one of the great military and economic nation-states of the world, a status which it doubtless will hold for the foreseeable future.

If this seems obvious, it is worth recalling that at the end of World War II the United States—for a fleeting moment in history—was the *only* great power on this planet, possessor of the *only* bomb. The Soviet Union had emerged from the war more savagely torn than any other land. The richest one-third of the nation had been put to the torch; the human losses were greater than those sustained by all other belligerents combined; and the remaining population was exhausted by 5 cruel years of effort and privation.

Yet within 15 years—and by prodigious energy and sacrifice, all of the Soviet Union had become, for the first time since the revolution, a top rank world power. In the view of most people the Soviet Union had become, in fact, the other superpower of the postwar world. Its scientific accomplishments are indubitably formidable and no one will doubt that the Soviet people have reason for pride in national accomplishment; it is

now economically possible for the Soviets to make rapid strides in raising the people's standard of living once political factors free a greater allocation of resources to the fulfillment of civilian needs.

But those successes have to do only with the fortunes of the Soviet Union *as a nation* within a world system of nation-states—not with its political or social system or with its pretensions to lead a world movement called communism. What about the fortunes of communism?

Turning of Tides Against World Communism

As we look back now we can see that the attractive power of communism on a global scale reached its peak in the years immediately following World War II.

At the close of the war Europe and Japan were smashed; the colonial empires were due to rumble; Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa were about to catch fire; and Latin America was slumbering deceptively under obsolete, and therefore flammable, economic and social systems.

The Soviet Union had been victorious in the war against nazism and fascism; the Red army had covered itself with glory; the Communists throughout occupied Europe had supported and often led the underground resistance movements and thus became national heroes; Communists were taken into the cabinets of postwar European governments to represent large, flourishing, and well-financed national Communist parties and elsewhere in the world Communists were as active as they could be in the national independence movements about to sweep the world.

Much of the world looked ripe for the kind of violent change and political chaos which sets the stage for Communists to play their classic role of scavengers.

In the name of international communism Stalin started things off by putting the clamp on eastern and parts of central Europe—by keeping territory already overrun by the Red army.

Then came the great windfall for communism with the collapse of Nationalist China and the consequent resounding impact of the Chinese revolution on Asian affairs and Asian thinking. The call went out from a meeting in Calcutta for Communist uprisings throughout Asia, and soon China was launched in that apparently spectacular

her "great leap forward" which many began to see as the model for modernization.

For a while communism really began to look to many—including some of our homegrown hayseeds—as the wave of the future. But suddenly it passed its peak. Soviet pressures on Iran and Turkey, the Communist insurrection in Greece, the Berlin blockade, and unrelenting hostility evoked counter measures from the West. Interference in the Italian elections, the campaign to sabotage European recovery, and most of all the rape of Czechoslovakia produced a moral revulsion in Europe. By about 1950 the bloom was off the rose. The tide of communism in Western Europe began to ebb, and it has been ebbing ever since.

The turn came somewhat later in Asia as the "great leap forward" ground to a noisy halt and then went into reverse—as one disaster of Communist mismanagement followed another until the refugees swarmed into Hong Kong, as insurrections were put down in Malaya and the Philippines and the call to revolution went unheeded elsewhere, and as Asians learned from Korea, from Indochina, from Tibet, and finally from the invasion of India, what the Europeans learned from Czechoslovakia.

Weakened Communist parties in Asia are now torn between loyalty to Moscow or Peking—or to some national variant of communism; and the tide may now be ebbing for the Communists in Asia as it did for those in Europe a dozen years ago.

Meanwhile in the Middle East the famous Communist "penetration" of the midfifties ran out of gas as the Communists typically overplayed their hands and, also typically, bumped their heads against nationalism and a stubborn rejection of alien doctrine. Whatever social forms evolve in the Middle East, they will be in the name of local nationalisms, not proletarian internationalism; and in most countries it will be sanctified by Moslem, not Communist, prophets—by Mohammed perhaps, but not by Marx.

In Africa the Soviets leapt at the chance opened for them in the Congo. But they played their hand badly at the United Nations, voting three times in the Security Council for a Congo operation that cut right across their own plans for penetration. They showed their cards carelessly by flying in those big Ilyushins with conspicuous

aid and "ugly Russians"; they apparently thought the levers of power needed only to be grasped, not realizing they first had to be created; they bet heavily and clumsily on an ineffective effort to prop up [Antoine] Gizenga; when they took out on Dag Hammarskjold their frustrations in the Congo, they succeeded only in lining up against their Congo policy nearly all the small nations, who would not brook an attack on the U.N. itself.

Elsewhere in Africa the Soviets had their nuckles rapped when they tried some heavy-handed meddling in other people's politics. The leaders of Africa, like those of Asia and the Middle East, clearly prefer to make their own independent mistakes without outside guidance. The struggle for Africa has only begun, but from the Communist standpoint it is not going too well.

The last chance for communism to look like the wave of the future was in Latin America, but that chance has now been reduced by the sordid story of Dr. Castro and his sellout to Moscow. The Communists still have plenty of capacity for disruption and general mischief, but the prospects for the Soviet push into the hemisphere don't look so bright after the unanimous determination of the Organization of American States to shoo them off. Now much depends on what we Americans do in our own hemisphere, starting with redoubled efforts to make the Alliance for Progress hum with the noises of progress and reform.

The turning of the tides against world communism has been brought about mainly by a whole series of U.S. and Allied moves which made it abundantly clear that freedom was much more than a wave of the past—the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, the Berlin airlift, Korea, NATO, the Rio Treaty, ANZUS, Point 4, the Alliance for Progress, the Common Market, our aid to South Viet-Nam, and many more—the sum of postwar moves by the Western World, with U.S. leadership, to contain the outward thrust of Soviet communism and to develop the inward thrust of economic strength and defensive power in the non-Communist world. And the turning of the tide was also greatly helped by the deepening schism in the Communist church and the spinoff of rival denominations.

Thus communism as a world movement, reaching its crest in the immediate postwar years, began to ebb first in Europe, then Asia, the Middle

East, and Africa, and now—with those departings mississ— in Latin America.

Communism as a worldwide revolution is not stone dead. The wave can again surge forward but with lesser strength and more backwash. And as he has recently demonstrated, Chairman Khrushchev is a man who can see the holes in the ladder.

Slowdown of Communist Economy

What of communism as a social system in the Soviet Union? What became of that image of unblemished success that was to have exerted so powerfully attractive an influence on the young nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America?

The Soviet Union, as a Communist society, reached its peak of prestige and influence after the world Communist movement was already in decline—with Sputnik I or perhaps with Major Gagarin's flight. But here, too, the ebb tide has begun.

After the Second World War the Soviet Union engineered a most remarkable recovery from the worst punishment any nation has ever suffered in war. When Chairman Khrushchev came along he looked like a new kind of Communist—an extroverted political executive more interested in getting things done than in reciting the scriptures. The internal terror was lifted, and Soviet society seemed on its way to more liberal days; the Soviets were starting to move about in the outside world and to dish out aid and trade; the internal economy was booming and was beginning to look like a patented prescription for rapid modernity; the Soviets were riding the nationalist revolutions for all they were worth—and then along came evidence that, by the measure of rocketry, the Soviet Union has surpassed the United States in outer space.

That peak of prestige, too, now is past. The current successes and future prospects of the U.S. outer space program—including Telstar and meteorological satellites as well as manned flight and deep probes—have wiped out the mirage of overall Soviet scientific leadership. They are good—in some fields superb—but they are not the best.

Even as the world was gasping at sputniks and orbiting cosmonauts, a lengthening inventory of internal problems suggested that Soviet Communist society might not, after all, be the answer to man's fondest aspirations.

A slowed-down Soviet economy seems to be faced with a clear need for rather drastic reform if it is going to maintain growth on the same scale—and the miserable record of agriculture in nearly Communist states is a well-known scandal whenever planners discuss the advantages of alternative economic “systems.” Most recently the Communist planners in Peking, reading woodenly out of that same dog-eared book on agricultural economics that has ruined the farm production of half a dozen other Communist countries, have managed a great leap backward in Chinese agriculture too. With the entire underdeveloped world looking on—a world which is 75 percent rural—Communist planners have come face to face with the impossibility of growing food efficiently by police-state methods.

Meanwhile, in the democratic world the miracle of Germany was followed by the miracle of France, the miracle of Japan, the miracle of Italy, and now the miracle of the Common Market with the U.K. perhaps included and with an Atlantic economic partnership on the horizon. Our mixed economy does not seem to be collapsing from internal contradictions or anything else; the so-called “capitalist camp” is not going to civil war over dwindling world markets or anything else; and the European Common Market now embraces an industrial complex so impressive that our Soviet critics, having failed to prevent it from coming about, are now trying to create their own common market with Eastern Europe and calling rather defensively for freer trade and economic cooperation between the Eastern apostles of autarky and the Western practitioners of liberalized trade.

Some Facts About the Soviet Union

If communism as a revolutionary world movement is in partial eclipse—and if Soviet society is no longer so bright a magnet—what of the Soviet Union as a nation-state? The U.S.S.R. is and will remain a great power. But these things must also be said:

—The Soviet Union is half modern and half rural slum. If the modern half is to continue to grow at the same pace, it must adopt more adequate substitutes for a price-and-profit system, which indeed it appears to be moving toward—and trying to invent some modern Marxist language to describe. If the slum half is to become

modern, the Russians will have to alter Communist agricultural doctrine some more, which will change quite a lot of other things.

—The Soviet Union is now run by a man who took one of the most risky and radical steps conceivable to change life in Russia—the total destruction of the reputation of a Soviet idol—and in the process clearly implied that the Communist system cannot protect a people against brutality, error, sin, and incompetence at the top. The lesson can hardly have been lost on the Soviet people.

—Before long the Soviet Union will come under another generation of leadership (though still without a mechanism for orderly transfer of power). For better or for worse, the new men will see things somewhat differently than the present leadership; how they see things will much depend on how vigorously *we* have been using *our* opportunities around the world.

—State controls in the Soviet Union are being slowly eroded by writers, painters, jazz buffs, beatniks, juvenile delinquents, black marketeers, and nylon stockings—probably an irreversible process—further testimony that all the propaganda in the world cannot undo the cussed determination of modern man to seek his own kind of freedom, wearing his own collar.

Let us look at a few more facts:

—The Soviet Union is a not-quite-so-closed society at a time when science and technology are making closed societies increasingly hard to keep shut off from the turbulent, interesting world of pluralism and variety outside the wall.

—The Soviet Union clearly does not possess the exclusive patent for rapid industrialization and economic growth, given the “miracles” of Germany, France, Italy, and Japan—or Israel or Puerto Rico for that matter. And so the developing countries are passing up the temptation to copy the faded Soviet blueprint.

—The Soviet Union is suzerain of a group of European states in which nationalism will not die, which also are being de-Stalinized, which are all having trouble with their agricultural sectors, and whose centrifugal pull probably may someday result in the creation of a much looser commonwealth—which was briefly offered to them, you will remember, at the height of the Hungarian crisis. And a looser commonwealth is the beginning of the end of that antique Communist dream, the closed and monolithic empire.

--The foreign policy of the Soviet Union is frustrated by U.S. initiative, by prolonged stalemate, by the undependability of Communist China, by nuclear inferiority, by the failure to capture the world nationalist revolution, and now by pullback in the Caribbean.

--The Soviet Union is a member of the United Nations, which it will not support, cannot control, but dares not quit.

--The Soviet Union is engaged in a prestige race for achievement in outer space which is a serious drain on resources and competes for funds with the armed forces and the need for heavy investment in agriculture and some sectors of industry.

Prospects of a Watershed in the Cold War

It is hard for an American, or any Western man, to compensate for the special prisms imposed on the vision of a Communist. But to Western eyes, trying to look at things from where Soviet man sits, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that a point has been reached at which the wisest, indeed the only sensible, course of action for the Soviet Union is to seek some basis for living more safely on the same planet with the non-Communist nations—some live-and-let-live formula, some set of explicit or tacit ground rules for nonmilitary competition.

This would have been a rational conclusion for Soviet leaders to reach before the recent events in the Caribbean and along the Sino-Indian frontiers. But in the wake of these crises the Soviet leaders would be justified in finding that such a conclusion is not only rational but imperative: They have played out their hand of nuclear blackmail and failed: the West looks more formidable than ever; the danger of putting nuclear weapons in the hands of too many nations is now too obvious; the vision of unity in the Communist world has turned out to be illusory; the nonaligned states are showing signs of clearer thinking about where their national interests really lie; the East European satellites can be excused for certain apprehensions about the future; and the mythical goal of a Communist world revolution begins to look more and more expensive, more and more unlikely of achievement.

If Soviet leaders are prepared to finish the job of liquidating the Cuban crisis, we may find ourselves at an important turning point in history, at a watershed of the cold war as we have known it. For the Soviet leaders hold in their hands one of

the world's most powerful weapons: the simple decision to live at peace with their neighbors, to stop fighting the United Nations and gradually join it in fact as well as name, to start down the road toward disarmament, to enter piecemeal into cooperative scientific and technical projects, and, in time, to become so enmeshed in international organizations and obligations that it becomes inescapably clear to them—as it is already clear to the rest of us—that there is much more to be won in this world by cooperation than by coercion.

But there is a problem in discussing the prospects of a watershed in world affairs. It is this: People immediately jump to the conclusion that we shall wake up some fine Friday morning and discover that the horrors and threats and sweat and struggles of the past decade and a half were no more than bad dreams; all of a sudden, the tensions will go out of international life, and we can all return to those more private and more placid pursuits which we all claim to yearn for. And the United Nations, of course, will take care of any unpleasantness that might intrude on the new "normalcy" in world affairs.

This, of course, is bottled-in-Bond mythology. There will be no Friday morning awakening.

The tattered remains of Communist ideology, including the mad dream of a Communist one-world, will die hard in the minds of reactionary dogmatists and will haunt new generations of Communist leaders.

Red China will remain a threat, probably a growing threat, to the peace of the whole world. We cannot see through the Himalayan mists to know what an aggressive China with modern weapons may mean for us, but it more obviously adds to the dangers than to the opportunities.

The ancient and fundamental struggle between freedom and coercion will go on within the minds of men, within national societies, within the world community.

Deep and dangerous disputes rooted in religion, race, and national ambition will continue to crackle and threaten to explode.

Injustice and poverty will continue to subvert political stability and retard social progress.

Greed, ambition, and love of power will still stir and poison the minds of men.

And a Soviet Union in a more nationalistic frame of mind could conceivably become troublesome to a Soviet Union promoting an illusory

world revolution of the proletariat. In any event a Soviet Union which had abandoned the military confrontation with the United States would shift to the field of economic competition; it would still cling to totalitarian principles; it would still for a time cling to the foreign real estate kept as booty from World War II; it would still be warped by inherited dogma; it would still be fearful of the open society, addicted to the secrecy that antedates communism in Russia; it would still be suspicious of the motives of that noisy and various world community which the Communists insist on calling the "capitalist camp." **Living at peace** with its neighbor will not come easy to a state with so many phobias and neuroses. Yet it would make sense for the Soviet Union today.

So what I mean by a turning point in contemporary history is far from a 180-degree turnaround—more like an evolutionary mutation, changing subtly and with massive deliberation but—we can hope—moving in the direction of peace through complex forms of cooperation rather than war through simple appeals to pride and prejudice.

Evidence of Maturity in U.S. Reaction to Crisis

Does all this have anything to do with what teachers should teach and what children should learn about world affairs in the schools of this country? I shall not try to coach professionals in your business about how to order your own affairs.

But I can, I think, suggest a few lessons that can be drawn from recent exposure in the world political arena—that arena in which crisis brings both danger and opportunity. If the lessons are valid for diplomats, they are valid for teachers; if they are valid for adults, they are valid for youngsters. To me at least, several things are very clear from the busy days and nights of the past months:

First: Crises never develop in quite the way—or at quite the time—the experts expect them to develop. All planning is contingent, and most action is extemporaneous.

Second: The restrained use of power, the application of the gentlest form of power that serves the purpose, is the most difficult and demanding exercise of power. We therefore must learn how to clench our teeth and maintain in combination a degree of restraint and a degree of simple courage that has never before been asked of a democratic people.

Third: Each problem or crisis in world affairs is unique and therefore demands its own solution—a mix of power and diplomacy, force and restraint; its own instruments of action or leverage, instruments military, political, economic, or persuasive; its own choices between national action, bilateral diplomacy, action by regional allies, and the use of the United Nations as forum, mediator, and policeman; or, as in the Cuban case, a judicious mixture of all of these. We therefore must refrain from generalizing from the particular—refrain from assuming, for example, that what worked in the Caribbean last month necessarily will work the same way anywhere else. And we also must create and build and learn to work these complicated and fascinating instrumentalities of our great but limited power, including the 51 international clubs of which we are paid-up members.

Fourth: There is no single or simple answer to the woes of the world at any given time, no fundamentalist theory or formula with the whole solution, no one blinding insight into the meaning of it all. The better one understands that human affairs are almost infinitely complex, the clearer will be the vision. There is hardly an issue in world affairs worth discussion which is not interrelated with other issues; which does not involve a mix of strategic, political, economic, and other factors; which does not involve some elements which we control and other elements which we do not control; which does not involve contradictions between domestic politics and international policies—for ourselves and for everyone else party to the issue. And this is why we have to search, untiring and unfrustrated, not for the simple answer which is always wrong but for the answer which is complex enough to be right.

And fifth: We have seen clearly, I think, that real toughness in world affairs is best seen as maturity. Maturity requires a cool head, steady nerves, unflagging patience, tiresome restraint, and the sheer capacity to repeat ourselves until we are sure we are understood—which is sometimes long past the point of extreme boredom. It also requires that ready confidence, that calm faith in the future of freedom and variety in human affairs, and that healthy pinch of optimism which help us to see that the deep tides of history are moving in our direction and impel us to seize the opportunities while facing up to the dangers. Finally, maturity requires a clear understanding

that we cannot impose quick solutions but we can, by keeping stubbornly, everlastingly, at it, influence the course of world affairs—not only at moments of deep crisis but during the intervals in which day-to-day actions determine whether there shall, in fact, be a new crisis and, if so, what it shall look like.

We will do well to cultivate these qualities and attitudes in ourselves and in our students. The future of our nation, no less, may depend on them.

If you ponder the recent spectacular turns in world affairs, I think you will agree that these

lessons have been reflected in the performance of the United States. They add up to evidence of a maturity which is becoming a dominant motif in American public reaction to each successive crisis.

If the American Government behaved professionally and maturely through the grim weeks just past—and I think it did—it was able to do so because the American public kept its head, its tongue, and its faith as well and rejected homegrown hysterics by ignoring them. And that augurs well for all of us in this exhilarating world who prefer freedom and intend to see it prevail.